

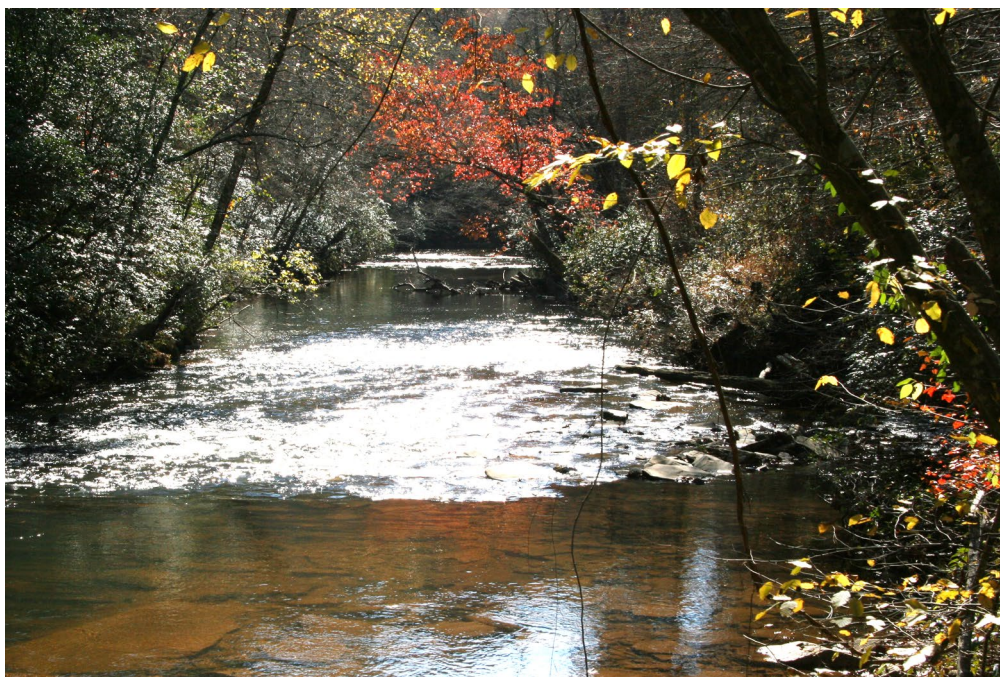


Southeast Regional Strategy

Conserving At-Risk Species

The Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2011 began implementing a conservation strategy to comprehensively and systematically address the status of more than 400 fish, wildlife and plant species that may need protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

(For the latest news on the Region's progress, go to www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation.)



Many of the Southeast's at-risk species are aquatic or depend on aquatic habitats. Shoal Creek in north Georgia, by USFWS.



Mike Sealy, a biologist in USFWS Louisiana Field Office holding a Louisiana pine snake, by USFWS.

Goal

Conserve the Southeast's lands, waters and outdoor way of life by working with public and private partners to save as many at-risk species as possible over the next decade, hopefully precluding the need to list them under the Endangered Species Act.

Five Action Areas

■ Prioritize At-Risk Species for Proactive Conservation Needs

Working closely with the States, the Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is categorizing species to evaluate actions needed to determine the status of the species populations. The categories are:

Conservation Ready – These species are ready for immediate, proactive conservation. Their life histories are well understood, threats can be addressed and partnerships exist or could be developed, e.g. the gopher tortoise.

Information Lacking – Information on the populations status is lacking or threats may not be understood. This includes species that biologists believe status could be fairly readily determined through surveys or other research.

Unknown – Species with major information gaps on their distribution, population and status.

Decision Ready – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has adequate information to evaluate the species and make a decision on whether or not to list these species under the ESA.

In addition, the Service is developing a searchable, public database of at-risk species organized by taxa, State, habitat type, staff contacts and pending or signed conservation agreements.



Longleaf pine forests harbor dozens of at-risk species including the gopher tortoise, black pine snake and striped newt, by USFWS.

“In the next 10 years, the Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will have to evaluate a record number of species for possible listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Our goal is not to list species, but to conserve them in voluntary and innovative ways for future generations of Americans.”

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Southeast Regional Director
Cindy Dohner

■ Voluntary Conservation Actions

There is no Federal protection for at-risk species, which means proactive conservation often happens through voluntary actions by public and private partners. In many cases, landowners are managing important habitat for these species by following the best management practices for forestry, agriculture and other land uses, using methods such as fencing to keep livestock out of streams and prescribed burning.

Their multi-generational land and water stewardship is the reason many of these species are doing well, and the Service lacks only documentation of their contributions. To better incentivize States, other Federal agencies, the public and private landowners, the Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working to improve the conservation tools available. The effort has involved training Service staff, streamlining the development and approval of partner agreements, and tracking those agreements.

■ Partnerships

The Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with numerous partners to conserve species across the landscape. Among those efforts is working with the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) Wildlife Diversity Committee and the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) Candidate Conservation Issue Team. We are also working with the States to draft a Range-Wide Conservation Strategy for the Gopher Tortoise, piloting a candidate conservation credit system and providing technical guidance to the Natural Resources Conservation Service on the Working Lands for Wildlife contracts with private landowners for gopher tortoise conservation.



Bartram's hairstreak on Big Pine Key by Holly L Salvato

■ Collect Data for Listing Decisions

The Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is evaluating existing data systems used by the Service to collect information on public and private conservation efforts. There are a variety of databases, including ECOS, which are not integrated and do not readily provide the information needed.

■ Outreach

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff have reached out to more than 2,000 individuals and dozens of organizations, including Congressional staff members, to engage them in proactively conserving at-risk species. Outreach is being conducted through meeting presentations, a website (www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation), printed materials, a video, a listserv and direct emails.

Background

The record number of species' evaluations is in part the result of national, multi-district litigation and a mega-petition brought by several conservation groups. The groups are asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide Federal protection to species that are currently candidates for the Threatened and Endangered List under the ESA, and Southeastern aquatic and aquatic-dependent species.

For more information

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